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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute English

### No more bosses

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

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**Neil**

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

**Georgina**

And I'm Georgina.

**Neil**

After working together at BBC Learning English for many years, Georgina, you and I have a good working relationship, don't we?

**Georgina**

Sure, I think we make a great team!

**Neil**

But have you ever had a boss who you just couldn't work with?

**Georgina**

Oh, you mean a bad boss – someone you just can't get on with no matter how hard you try. Yes, I've had one or two over the years – not *you* of course, Neil!

**Neil**

I'm glad to hear it, Georgina! Often this happens because workers feel they aren't listened to by managers. Or it might be because most companies are **hierarchies** - systems of organising people according to their level of importance.

**Georgina**

Managers on top, workers down below.

**Neil**

But in this programme we hear from companies who've got rid of managers and say it has helped them do a better job, made them happier and saved money.

## Georgina

We'll meet a self-managing company which isn't **hierarchical** and has no boss. And of course we'll be learning some new vocabulary along the way.

## Neil

But first, today's quiz question. One of the biggest problems in **hierarchies** is the excess cost of management and bureaucracy. But how much is that estimated to cost the US economy every year? Is it:

- a) 3 million dollars?,
- b) 3 billion dollars?, or
- c) 3 trillion dollars?

## Georgina

I'll say c) 3 trillion dollars – that's one followed by twelve zeros - a lot of money!

## Neil

OK, Georgina, we'll find out later if you're right. Now, one of the first companies to experiment successfully with self-management was Californian tomato grower *Morning Star*. Here's one of their employees, Doug Kirkpatrick, talking to Dina Newman for the BBC World Service programme, *People Fixing the World*:

## Doug Kirkpatrick

The first principle was that human beings should not use force or **coercion** against other human beings. And the second principle was that people should keep the **commitments** they make to each other and so we adopted them as pretty much the entire governance of the enterprise.

## Georgina

Because *Morning Star* has no bosses, decisions are made by all employees equally without **coercion** – the use of force to persuade someone to do something they do not want to do.

## Neil

As self-managers, employees can't tell other employees what to do. Everything is based on requesting someone to act and them responding.

## Georgina

This motivates and empowers workers but also means they must keep their **commitments** - promises or firm decisions to do something when requested.

## Neil

This way of working is great for some – they feel listened to and have a voice in how the company is run.

### **Georgina**

But Dina questions whether this is true for everybody working at *Morning Star*:

### **Dina Newman**

Would it be true to say that a self-managed company like yours empowers people who are already very good and it **leaves behind** those who are not so good?

### **Doug Kirkpatrick**

I'm not sure I accept the phrase '**left behind**'. There are some people **who take full advantage** of this environment; others take less advantage but they do benefit because their voice is respected, when they do propose something it must be listened to, they are not subject to force and coercion and if they don't act according to their commitments they can **be held accountable** by anyone.

### **Neil**

Having no bosses sounds great, but the extra responsibility can create more work and stress. Different workers respond to this in different ways and some employees may be **left behind** - remain at a lower level than others because they are not as quick to develop.

### **Georgina**

However other workers enjoy managing themselves and **take full advantage** of the system - make good use of the opportunity to improve and achieve their goals.

### **Neil**

No matter whether employees are good self-managers or not, ultimately they are **held accountable** for their work performance – asked to accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

### **Georgina**

So, although having no boss sounds good, if things go wrong, there's no-one to blame but yourself!

### **Neil**

So maybe we do need those managers after all – which reminds me of our quiz question.

### **Georgina**

You asked me to estimate how much the US economy loses in excess bureaucracy and managerial costs every year.

**Neil**

And you said?

**Georgina**

c) 3 trillion dollars.

**Neil**

Which was absolutely right! Well done!

**Georgina**

And the cost keeps rising because, of course, the more managers there are, the more managers you need to manage the managers!

**Neil**

Today we've been looking at the world of self-management - companies run without bosses, which, unlike most businesses, are not based on a **hierarchy** – system of organising people according to their level of importance.

**Georgina**

Instead companies like San Francisco's *Morning Star* allow employees to make their own **commitments** – promises to act, rather than using **coercion** – or forceful persuasion – to get results.

**Neil**

Many employees react positively to this working environment and **take full advantage of it** - make good use of the opportunity to progress or achieve their goals.

**Georgina**

However, there is a risk that others who are more comfortable being managed may get **left behind** - remain at a lower level than others because they are not as quick to improve and adapt.

**Neil**

But whatever their job role or feelings about self-management, all workers are **held accountable** – asked to accept responsibility for their performance at work.

**Georgina**

Meaning they take can the credit for when things go well...

**Neil**

...but have nobody to hide behind when things go badly!

**Georgina**

That's all from us today, but remember to join us again soon for more topical discussion and related vocabulary here at 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English.

**Neil**

Bye for now.

**Georgina**

Bye.

**VOCABULARY****hierarchy**

system of organising people according to their level of importance

**coercion**

the use of force to persuade someone to do something they do not want to do

**commitment**

a promise or firm decision to do something

**left behind**

remain at a lower level than others because you are not as quick to improve, develop or progress

**take full advantage (of)**

make good use of an opportunity to progress or achieve a goal

**be held accountable**

accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions